

Posted by u/LgFatherAnthrocite 2 years ago 🏆

Just Curious

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In a small room filled with chairs and a small podium, several dozen humans and aliens had gathered. Off to one side were several screens, showing an ever changing collage of pictures. Most featured a single human male, while others were small devices, and handicrafts. Some showed groups of people as well.

A Xickthi approached the podium, and after a few moments, the low murmur of the crowd settled down.

“Dan Nicols was a man who failed at everything he ever did. He was, in his own words, a student of failure. To me, this was a deeply troubling statement, the first time I heard it. I have spent my life trying to succeed at every endeavor I have undertaken. I think this demonstrates a fundamental difference in the way my thinking differed from his. Dan was not afraid to fail at anything. He would play new games, and lose in spectacular fashion. He would constantly try doing new things, often making egregious mistakes and getting abject failure as a result.”

“However, he never let such failures hold him back. He often kept them as trophies of his exploits. He was known to carry a shoulder bag he had designed, with a strap that was too long, and pockets that were too small. He had a shelf covered with small pieces of wood which were clearly unfinished projects that had failed. He had trinkets and “doodads”, as he called them, that had been produced by a number of different methods, all failures. I asked him once if he had ever succeeded at anything. ‘Oh, all the time! I just usually give the good stuff away as gifts. Making stuff is fun, but I don’t need a half dozen cutting boards or 200 pens. I don’t need 10 blank books. But I have 10 friends who could each use one.”

“When I asked him why he kept the bad pieces, the failures his response was ‘I’m not going to give away the bad ones, bud. Come on.’ It was more fun for him to make a thing and give it to someone, than to make a thing and keep it precious to himself. There are many here who even now, carry a small object he made.” The Xickthi opened a pouch on his harness and pulled out a keyfob with a shiny wooden charm on it. Many others in the seats held up small items made of wood, metal, fabric, and plastic.

The alien put the keyfob away, and proceeded. “He said he was a student of failure because if he looked at what he had done that failed, he could learn how to avoid such failures in the future. He said that the thing that made him so talented was that failure was never an endpoint in a project. It was a lesson in how not to proceed on the next attempt. For every wooden bowl he made on the lathe, he said, at least one more had broken apart before completion. For every charm he made his wife, a burned lump of metal came first. He claimed, falsely, that he was not a particularly smart man, but that he was “just curious” about a lot of things, and had a lot of free time.”

“Just Curious. It was because he was ‘Just Curious’ about the Xickthi that he first approached me. He was fascinated by our artwork. He asked if it was a common practice, or if only specially trained artists made it which piece was my favorite. He asked about our food, entertainment, recommendations for literature. Every few days he would come to my office, and seek some tidbit of knowledge. After a few weeks I began to expect such visits, and in short order enjoy them. I remember the first time he invited me to his home, for a party, and how he had made a special effort to make my favorite food. It was...not good. He apologized. But he never gave up, and after five or six tries, he actually made a really good Brefght tart. He was a good friend and a good man, and his only true failure, as far as I can tell, is leaving this place before we were all ready to let him go. May his spirit fly forever with the Great Bird of the Galaxy.”